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\$10 million in electric-bill aid expected to go fast

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BY MARY WISNIEWSKI Business Reporter

Illinois has \$10 million to give away to low-income people who need help paying their electric bills during this over-heated summer.

Those who need assistance should act fast, because the money's being distributed on a first-come, first-served basis, and is expected to go quickly, according to Charles Jackson, deputy director of the Illinois Department of Public Aid.

"There is high demand," Jackson said. "We know that the local agencies are very busy accepting applications."

Through the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program or LIHEAP, electric bill payments will be made on behalf of seniors, the disabled, families with very young children and people with medical conditions that would be aggravated by the extreme heat.

The state is supplying \$8 million, while ComEd gave \$2 million. ComEd gave another \$1 million to the City of Chicago to use at its discretion to help city residents cope with the heat.

The energy grant applications will be processed through a network of 35 local administering agencies around the state. The state- and federal-funded program assists households with incomes of up to 150 percent of the federal poverty level.

Jackson said ComEd had disconnected about 2,400 households as of July 25.

He could not say how much LIHEAP money already has been distributed.

Jackson said the state last had a cooling program two years ago. The state is using LIHEAP money that ordinarily would have been used to start running the winter heating program Sept. 1 before Illinois receives its new LIHEAP grant for the winter season, Jackson said.

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